

What is claimed is:

1. A method for allocating work items in a contact center, comprising:
  - (a) providing a set of resources operable to service a work item;
  - (b) requesting at least some of the resources in the set of resources to submit a bid to service the work item;
  - 5 (c) receiving at least one bid to service the work item; and
  - (d) based at least in part on the at least one bid, selecting a resource from among the set of resources to service the work item.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the set of resources comprises a plurality of resources external to the contact center.
3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising:  
identifying a subset of resources from among the set of resources qualified to service the work item; and wherein, in the requesting step, a bid request is provided to each of the resources in the subset of resources.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting, receiving and selecting steps are performed only during a bidding operational mode.
5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting step comprises:

- monitoring at least one queue of work items, the at least one queue of work items corresponding to a first set of resources for servicing work items in the at least one queue; when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, performing
- 5 steps (b) through (d); and
- when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not performing steps (b) through (d).

6. The method of Claim 5, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one work item in the at least one queue will not be satisfied.

7. The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting step comprises: determining a time interval for performance of steps (b) through (d).

8. The method of Claim 5, wherein the monitoring step comprises: determining, from the at least one queue, a representation of a required queue for at least one goal to be realized for each work item in the at least one queue.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when a queue position in the required queue is less than a number of work items ahead of the queue position in the required queue.

10. The method of Claim 5, further comprising:

determining a time when the predetermined workload level will likely exist.

11. The method of Claim 5, further comprising:

determining a number and identities of work items to be presented for bidding to the set of resources.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein the selecting step comprises:

comparing the received bids with a maximum acceptable bid.

13. The method of Claim 1, wherein the selecting step comprises:

determining, for each bidding resource, a composite value reflecting a plurality of a work item value, a resource value and a bid; and

comparing the determined composite values to select a resource to service the  
5 work item.

14. The method of Claim 1, further comprising after the receiving step:

determining whether or not a workload level for the contact center requires the work item that is the subject of the received bids to be serviced by a resource in the set of resources.

15. The method of Claim 1, further comprising after the selecting step:

displaying the selected bid and/or information associated with the selected bid to at least some resources in the set of resources; and  
receiving additional bids after the displaying step.

16. The method of Claim 1, wherein at least some of the resources are human agents.

17. The method of Claim 1, wherein the bid is at least one of a monetary service fee, a service time, an opportunity cost to the contact center for servicing the work item, and an overhead cost to the contact center for servicing the work item.

18. The method of Claim 1, wherein a plurality of work items are put out for bid and further comprising:  
dynamically varying a bidding time for each of the plurality of work items.

19. A computer readable medium containing instructions for performing the steps of Claim 1.

20. A logic circuit operable to perform the steps of Claim 1.

21. A table maintained in an electronic memory of a contact center, comprising:
- an identity of at least one work item;
  - at least one bid received for the at least one work item; and
  - 5 for each received bid:
    - an identity of a resource placing the bid; and
    - at least one of a value of the resource and a value of the work item.
22. The table of Claim 21, further comprising:
- a composite value based on the at least one bid and the at least one of a resource value and work item value.
23. The table of Claim 21, wherein the at least one of a resource value and work item value comprises both the resource value and the work item value.

24. A contact center for servicing a plurality of contacts received from a plurality of customers, comprising:

a plurality of workstations corresponding to a plurality of resources;

a central server in communication with the plurality of workstations, comprising:

5 at least one queue of contacts; and

a bid item selecting agent operable to (a) request at least some of the plurality of resources to submit a bid to service at least one contact; (b) receive at least one bid to service the at least one contact; and (c) select a resource from among the plurality of resources to service the at least one contact.

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25. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the plurality of workstations are external to the contact center and define a second set of workstations and the plurality of resources define a second set of resources and further comprising:

a first set of workstations corresponding to a first set of resources, wherein the  
5 workstations in the first set are internal to the contact center and wherein the workstations in the first workstation set are different from the workstations in the second workstation set.

26. The contact center of Claim 25, further comprising at least one second queue for holding contacts to be serviced by the first workstation set, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue of contacts are selected from the at least one second queue.

27. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the central server comprises a workload monitoring agent operable to monitor the at least one queue of contacts and determine, for each contact, at least one of a bid start time, a bidding process duration, and a bid completion time.

28. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue comprise one or more of realtime and non-real time contacts.

29. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is further operable to identify a set of resources from among the plurality of resources qualified to service the contact; and provide a bid request to each of the resources in the set of resources.

30. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent requests, receives and selects bids when a bidding operational mode is in effect but not when a bidding operational mode is not in effect.

31. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable, when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, perform functions (a) through (c) and, when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not performing functions (a) through (c).

32. The contact center of Claim 31, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one contact in the at least one queue will not be satisfied.

33. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is further operable to determine a time interval for performance of steps (a) through (c).

34. The contact center of Claim 27, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine, from the at least one queue, a representation of a required queue for at least one goal to be realized for each contact in the at least one queue.

35. The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when a queue position in the required queue is less than a number of enqueued contacts ahead of the queue position in the required queue.

36. The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine a time when the predetermined workload level will likely exist.

37. The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine a number and identities of contacts to be presented for bidding to the set of resources.



38. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable to compare the received bids with a maximum acceptable bid.

39. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable to determine, for each bidding resource, a composite value reflecting a one or more of a contact value, a resource value and a bid and compare the determined composite values to select a resource to service the contact.

40. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent, after performing the receiving function, is operable to determine whether or not a workload level for the contact center requires the contact that is the subject of the received bids to be serviced by a resource in the plurality of resources.

41. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent, after performing the selecting function, is operable to display the selected bid and/or information associated with the selected bid to at least some resources in the plurality of resources and thereafter receive additional bids.

42. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein at least some of the resources are human resources.

43. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the bid is at least one of a monetary service fee, a service time, an opportunity cost to the contact center for servicing the work item, and.

44. The contact center of Claim 24, wherein a plurality of contacts are put out for bid and the selecting agent is operable to vary dynamically a bidding time for each of the plurality of contacts.

45. A contact center for servicing a plurality of contacts received from a plurality of customers, comprising:

a plurality of workstations corresponding to a plurality of resources;

a server in communication with the plurality of workstations, comprising:

5 at least one queue of contacts; and

a bid item selecting means for (a) requesting at least some of the plurality of resources to submit a bid to service at least one contact; (b) receiving at least one bid to service the at least one contact; and (c) selecting a resource from among the plurality of resources to service the at least one contact.

46. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the plurality of workstations are external to the contact center and define a second set of workstations and wherein the plurality of resources define a second set of resources and further comprising:

a first set of workstations corresponding to a first set of resources, wherein the  
5 workstations in the first workstation set are internal to the contact center and wherein the workstations in the first workstation set are different from the workstations in the second workstation set.

47. The contact center of Claim 45, further comprising at least one second queue for holding contacts to be serviced by the workstations in the first workstation set, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue of contacts are selected from the at least one second queue.

48. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the central server comprises a workload monitoring means for monitoring the at least one queue of contacts and determining, for each contact, at least one of a bid start time, a bidding process duration, and a bid completion time.

49. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue comprise one or more of realtime and non-real time contacts.

50. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is further operable to identify a set of resources from among the plurality of resources qualified to service the contact; and provide a bid request to each of the resources in the set of resources.

51. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means requests, receives and selects bids when a bidding operational mode is in effect but not when a bidding operational mode is not in effect.

52. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is operable, when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, perform functions (a) through (c) and, when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not performing functions (a) through (c).

53. The contact center of Claim 52, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one contact in the at least one queue will not be satisfied.

54. The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is further operable to determine a time interval for performance of steps (a) through (c).